DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 057 127 UD 011 916

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TITLE Inner City Disadvantaged and the Metropolitan Bind.
INSTITUTION Missouri Univ., Kansas City. Center for the Study of Metropolitan Problems in Education.
PUB DATE Jun 71
NOTE 15p.; Paper prepared for "Educating The Disadvantaged: School Year 1970-71," volume 3, New York, N.Y., AMS Press, Inc., 1971

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS City Demography; *City Problems; *Disadvantaged Youth; *Minority Groups; *Urban Education

ABSTRACT

In this essay on education for the poor who live in urban areas is discussed how the problems of large cities relate to the educational experience of disadvantaged children. The inter-related development of middle-class suburbs, blue-collar neighborhoods, and the central city are analyzed. The basic argument is that segregation and fragmentation in the metropolitan area creates a spiral of decline which in one way or another adversely affects all its residents. Solutions to the problems of inner city education, it is suggested, might include socioeconomic and racial desegregation of the metropolitan area as well as radical reform in schools and other community institutions. (Author/JW)

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THE INNER CITY DISADVANTAGED AND THE METROPOLITAN BIND

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June 1971

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UD011916

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Proposals frequently are made to help the urban disadvantaged by pumping money into the inner city poverty ghettoes in which a large proportion of them are concentrated. Compensatory education - the educational equivalent of such efforts to gild the poverty ghettoes - has been introduced following the presumption that smaller class size, special reading teachers, a longer school day, a year of preschool training and other ways of intensifying traditional school programs somehow will close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. But until it is realized that being economically disadvantaged in the modern metropolis means much more than simply being poor, metropolitan forces which are destroying the cities probably will continue to make life mean and hopeless for many of the urban disadvantaged.

The Inner City

Before examining some of the metropolitan forces which lock the urban disadvantaged into the inner city, it is important to understand how the inner city differs today from what it was several generations ago and what these differences imply for the functioning of fundamental social institutions such as the family and the school. Among the most crucial of these differences are that:

- today the inner city tends to be larger and to consist of more homogeneous working-class populations that it did in previous eras. Partly for this reason and partly because inner city neighborhoods now are populated by racial minority groups traditionally excluded from the larger society, inner city institutions tend to function less adequately in terms of socialization for upward mobility than was true years ago. For example, where inner city schools once had an appreciable proportion of students from families which either had achieved some aspects of middle class status or were aspiring with some success to achieve upward mobility, "hard

*Paper prepared for volume 3 of Educating the Disadvantaged. School Year 1970-71 AMS Press.

core" inner city schools in the big cities now consist almost entirely of lower working class youngsters whose parents have been defeated by social and racial segregation and who reflect the social and psychological despair associated with inner city street culture.

- unskilled and semi-skilled employment that supports a family at a level perceived as reasonably adequate by contemporary definitions is much less available than it was years ago. The result of this decline in what people regard as worthwhile employment opportunities is that families have less motivation and reinforcement to struggle incessantly for upward social mobility.

- in many cases, particularly in public housing projects which explicitly have been built to exclude all but working class families segregated by race as well as social class, the density of such families over an area of a few miles is much higher than was generally true years ago.

In short, whereas the inner core sections inhabited by low-income groups in the big cities previously served as "staging areas" in which migrants learned the ways of the city in preparation for social and economic mobility, today the inner city has become a high-density enclave of working-class families relatively cut off from the resources and influence of the larger society. The effect on socializing and educative institutions in the inner city has been little short of devastating, particularly since there is reason to believe that such institutions tend to lose their effectiveness once the incidence of problems they encounter reaches a critical level that makes it very difficult and perhaps sometimes impossible for them to function successively.[1]

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[1] Daniel U. Levine, "Threshold Phenomena in Inner-City Schools and Society," Education and Urban Society, v. 2, no. 4 (August, 1970), 347-359. See Chapter___, this volume.

How, then, can young people in the inner city be given educational opportunities that might help them attain their personal and career goals to the same extent as do youngsters already in the middle-class mainstream? The most obvious answer is that families should not be subjected to conditions in the inner city and young people should not be victimized by having to attend inner city schools. Stated differently, social class and racial segregation should be eliminated in the metropolitan area and its schools. Another possible response is that the schools and other institutions in the inner city should be radically redesigned to see if they can be made more effective; until this is done, no one can say for sure that the inner city inevitably must be an incubator for the destruction of human lives. In the case of schools, this would mean not just an appreciable increase in resources devoted to education, but, much more important, it would require a complete overhaul of programs and practices to make school experiences more appropriate and powerful in the lives of inner city children.[2] This reform in the school, in turn, possibly will depend on other major changes such as local community control of education, the emergence of effective instruments for internal social control in neighborhoods whose inhabitants presently are oppressed by external as well as internal forces, and a concomitant increase in political and social understandings and awareness among inner city residents of the ways in which their institutions function and why they perform so inadequately.[3] Even assuming that reforms this fundamental are in fact possible in the inner city given the enormous difficulty

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[2]At the present time a few outstanding schools have demonstrated that inner city youngsters can be given a reasonably satisfactory academic education at the elementary level but it is still not certain that inner city secondary schools can be reformed successfully as long as they bring together large numbers and proportions of disadvantaged students.

[3]Such understandings of one's condition and how it originates within the structure of the larger society is equivalent to what Paolo Friere calls the "conscienciazation" of the poor. See Paolo Friere, Cultural Action for Freedom (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, 1970).

of bringing about all the interdependent changes necessary for their realization, such changes (e.g., local community control of schools) are unlikely unless understood, accepted, and supported by metropolitan populations outside the inner city. A brief overview of the current metropolitan situation with respect to developments in some of the most important sectors of the metropolis indicates that widespread understanding of the need for eliminating inner city environments and/or radically reorganizing and renewing inner city institutions is not likely to be forthcoming.

The Central City

The central city is the large municipal center from which the metropolitan area takes its name. In addition to inner city poverty enclaves, the central city contains a number of distinctive communities such as white working-class neighborhoods, luxury high-rise apartment strips, and, in many cities, a few stable neighborhoods marked by social, economic, or racial diversity. Although there still are both lower- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods in the central cities and although many still have high-status, single-family residential areas within their borders, larger and older central cities have been losing middle-class population to the suburbs and also have been unable to stem the trend for business and industry to move to or locate in the suburbs.[4] A disproportionate number of these jobs, moreover, are of the type that might be held by black males, but in larger metropolitan areas black males tend to be segregated in the central cities and unable to take advantage of them.[5] As a result, the central cities have had a declining tax base and have become more and more hard-pressed to finance public services, particularly for their

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[4] In the St. Louis Metropolitan Area, for example, the number of jobs in the suburbs increased by 500 percent between 1954 and 1970 but the number of jobs in the city decreased by 20 percent. In the Philadelphia Area the number of jobs in the city declined from 774,000 to 759,000 between 1952 and 1966, while the suburbs were gaining 250,000 new jobs.

[5] Joseph D. Mooney, "Housing Segregation, Negro Employment and Metropolitan Decentralization: An Alternative Perspective," Quarterly Journal of Economics, v. 83, no. 2 (May 1969), 310.

low-income residents who in many ways cost more to provide with adequate health care, police protection, education, social welfare, and other necessary urban services.

This set of conditions has brought about a spiraling decline in the fortunes and quality of life in the central city. In most large metropolitan areas the central city directly finances zoos, museums, art galleries, concert halls, convention centers, and other facilities for the metropolitan population as a whole and indirectly subsidizes higher education, religious activities, and other metropolitan-wide functions which are located in the central city but are tax-exempt. Urban renewal projects are initiated by offering long-term tax abatement privileges to central city re-developers, but in many cases this deterioration in the city's tax base only serves to hasten the decay of the city as a whole. In addition, the central cities have sponsored or at least accepted highway projects which have destroyed property, accelerated slum formation and segregation by displacing low-income minority families, and increased air pollution, traffic congestion, noise nuisance, and other physical problems that further encourage the exodus of middle-class families to the suburbs. The end result frequently is that many residents of the central city are being taxed out of their homes to support inadequate city services and a deteriorating city environment.

The Middle-Class Suburbs

Although the growth of middle-class population in the suburbs has been inextricably tied to such factors as exhaustion of available residential space in the central city and decentralization of commerce and industry, fundamentally it has been produced by individual desires to live in the comfortable environment of single-family residences and small apartment complexes in newer neighborhoods outside the central city. For many families, the opportunity to provide their children with good education and to protect them from the troubles and inadequacies of the central

city and its schools also has played a major part in decisions to move to or live in the suburbs, often requiring an appreciable sacrifice from parents who can not easily afford the "best" suburbs.

Through low-density zoning which keeps out families with many young children who are costly to educate and low-income families which would require many expensive public services, residents of middle-class suburbs can and do maintain a pleasant environment relatively free of the problems of the central city, even though a good number of suburban cities and towns already are deteriorating just as the central city is and more will do so in the future. In short, the resident of the middle-class suburb is willing to spend a good deal of his resources buying himself and his children access to such desirable commodities as peaceful and pleasant surroundings, comfortable housing, and good educational opportunities just about equivalent to a private (but tax-supported) school.

Blue-Collar Neighborhoods

Blue-collar neighborhoods are found both in the central city, where they tend to be in older, non-slum locations, and the suburbs, where they tend to be tract developments in towns and cities less affluent than the middle-class suburbs. In many respects, blue collar families in the central city - many of which are Italians, Poles, and other Eastern and Southern European ethnics - bear the brunt of central city problems more directly than other city residents since their neighborhoods tend to be in the path of the expanding ghettoes and their incomes tend to be lower on the average than is true among middle-class families in the cities and suburbs. Blue-collar families in the suburbs tend to live in communities which were built up rapidly after the second world war and which frequently either are too small in relation to their tax base to provide such urban services as good roads, professional fire protection, sidewalks, adequate sewage facilities, and modern schools or require their residents to tax themselves to the hilt to provide this infrastructure.

Partly because there has been very little research on blue-collar suburbs, it is difficult to assess their place in the larger process of metropolitan evolution. To some degree, the appearance of blue-collar suburbs indicates that the older inner city "staging areas" for social mobility have moved from the central city to the suburbs. On the one hand upper-working-class white families which move from neighborhoods in or around the inner city to blue-collar suburbs probably gain by taking their children out of the deteriorating central city, but their exodus leaves behind mainly working-class minority families and the most depressed of low-income whites, with the disastrous results noted above on the inner city. On the other hand, there is a substantial body of research indicating that working-class white students suffer decrements in achievement[6] and aspirations[7] when they attend predominantly working-class schools. Since the elementary schools (though not the high schools) attended by students in blue-collar suburbs frequently are primarily working-class in socioeconomic composition, it is possible that current patterns of metropolitan segregation are as damaging or nearly as damaging educationally for white children in blue-collar suburbs as for black or other minority children in the inner city.

The Spiral of Metropolitan Decline

The crisis of the central city as a whole and the inner city in particular already has been described and needs little elaboration. Residents of the central

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[6] James S. Coleman, et al., Equality of Educational Opportunity (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966); George Mayeske, et al., A Study of Our Nation's Schools (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, n.d.)

[7] Richard P. Boyle, "The Effect of the High School on Students' Aspirations," American Journal of Sociology, v. 71 (May, 1966), 628-639; Daniel U. Levine, Edna S. Mitchell, and Robert J. Havighurst, Opportunities for Higher Education in a Metropolitan Area: A Study of High School Seniors in Kansas City, 1967 (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1971).

city subsidize suburban growth through federal tax write-offs or home owners, federal, state, and county allocations for highways, and sponsorship of cultural, educational, and recreational facilities which serve the entire metropolis; meanwhile their own tax base has been declining and the central city is unable to maintain the quality of its physical and social environments. In Milwaukee, where families earning five thousand dollars a year pay fifteen percent of their income in local and state taxes, forty percent of the land is set aside for tax-exempt purposes, and twenty percent of the population is either on welfare or living on poverty level incomes. In Boston, property taxes now take 10.8 percent of the income of families earning between five and fifteen thousand dollars per year. Acres of apartments in New York City, St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities are boarded up and deserted, with their former residents forced to live still more crowded together in nearby slums.[8] Although large economic strides were made between 1960 and 1970 by some former slum dwellers, inner city poverty areas remain about as large and slum-ridden today as they were ten years ago.[9] It is no wonder that many observers see the central city as having no place to go but further down.

The problems of middle-class suburbs and blue-collar neighborhoods are less overwhelming and until recently were much less visible, but in some ways they are similarly intractable.[10] Most suburbs, whether white-collar or blue-collar or mixed,

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[8] In New York City, for example, more than 12,000 buildings that once housed about 60,000 families have been abandoned - often to vagrants, juvenile gangs, and dope addicts. Gus Tyler, "Can Anyone Run a City?", Saturday Review, LII, no. 45 (November 8, 1969), 24.

[9] Although there were 9 percent fewer blacks in big city poverty areas in 1969 than in 1960, allowance for inflation and the geographic expansion of poverty areas plus the 1970 recession suggest that the population of big-city poverty areas is as large or larger today as ten years ago. See testimony of Conrad Taeuber in The Quality of Urban Life. Hearings Before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Urban Growth of the Committee on Banking and Currency, U. S. House of Representatives, Ninety-First Congress, pp. 219-238.

[10] If space allowed, it also would be desirable to identify the most fundamental problems in other types of metropolitan communities such as middle-class black neighborhoods and black suburbs.

are not only too small to finance adequate urban services but are in constant competition with each other to improve their tax base by keeping corporate taxes low and by offering other incentives to attract business and industrial enterprises (particularly those which can be set apart in industrial parks) as well as by excluding "undesirable"families. What this competition amounts to is a fiscal war of all against all which inevitably makes it impossible for the fragmented suburbs to cope with pollution, traffic, and other burgeoning problems. Parents in middle-class suburbs are increasingly finding that attempts to protect their children from the central city are backfiring: young people who grow up isolated from the reality of the metropolis tend to become alienated from their families and unable to find meaningful roles and careers within a society they perceive as artificial and sterile. Blue-collar families have a difficult time keeping up their homes and neighborhoods either in the central city or the suburbs, and their children attend schools which generally are less adequately financed and instructionally less effective than schools attended by middle-class students. Overall, the suburbs' restrictive zoning codes have made it impossible to build well-planned multi-family dwellings but in so doing the cost of building a decent single-family residence has become prohibitive for the great majority of U. S. families. Levitt and Sons, Inc., for example, builds two-and-three-bedroom houses for $24,000 to $35,000 and comparable town houses for $15,000 to $24,000, but low-density zoning frequently excludes town houses and other lower-priced housing.[11]

Since the median sales price of a new home in the suburbs is now over $27,000[12] and since a new $25,000 house is estimated to require an income of $14,000 to

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[11] Mark R. Arnold, "A Face-Lifting Begins in Suburbia," The National Observer, December 29, 1969, p. 1.

[12] Mark R. Arnold, "Courts May Rule On Challenge to Suburban Zoning," The National Observer, October 20, 1969, p. 1.

purchase and maintain, the great majority of U. S. families thereby are priced out of the new housing market.[13] In the New York Metropolitan Area, for example, 99.2 percent of the undeveloped land zoned for housing is for single-family homes and two-thirds is zoned for lots at least half an acre.[14] Meanwhile, 99 percent of the vacant land in the nation's 20 largest urban areas lies outside the central cities.[15]

In the face of this accelerating spiral of decline affecting both the central city and the "outer city" suburbs, the mutual understandings and constructive inter-relationships which are needed to build a more attractive future for the metropolis simply are not being worked out among the inhabitants of different metropolitan communities. For example:

- many residents of middle- and high-status communities sympathize with the plight of inner city populations but have too little personal knowledge of inner city realities to see through arguments which presume that inner city problems can be solved by adding some gilding to the ghetto. In addition, real change in the dynamics and directions of metropolitan development would threaten the existing advantages and privileges of residents of middle-status neighborhoods; thus many are quite willing to support and even help pay for change in the inner city but only as long as this does not involve the elimination of the very conditions - social and racial segregation in the metropolis - which are the most basic root cause of metropolitan decline in the first place.

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[13] Malcolm D. Rivkin, "Three Hopeful Augurs of Suburban Change," City, v. 5, no. 1 (January-February 1971), 68.

[14] Alvin Nazelberg, "Suit Would Spread Public Housing," Chicago Tribune, January 11, 1970, 3A p. 1.

[15] Paul and Linda Davidoff and Neil Newton Gold, "Suburban Action: Advocate Planning for an Open Society," American Institute of Planners Journal, v. 26, no. 1(January, 1970), 13.

- many residents of blue-collar as well as middle-class neighborhoods have too little personal experience to counteract stereotypes which portray blacks as hedonistic troublemakers and the poor as parasitic welfare chiselers, with obvious results in terms of their willingness to support and cooperate in programs for central city and metropolitan renewal. In addition, because blue-collar groups see that the residents of relatively affluent suburbs are protected from some of the direct effects of central city decay and because their own children have less adequate educational opportunities and more narrow career opportunities than middle-class youth, they tend with much justification to believe that efforts at inner city improvement constitute a conspiracy of the poor and the wealthy at the cost of their own best interests. Rather than coalescing with inner city residents to seek new directions in metropolitan development, they then tend to react still more belligerently against proposals which might pose a threat to what they have by altering the status quo. Politically, this situation helps keep residents of the central city divided among themselves and unable to defend themselves against the suburbanites' extraction of additional intra-metropolitan subsidies.

- residents of the poverty ghettoes, for their part, have too little personal experience and contact outside their neighborhood to counteract stereotypes which portray whites exclusively as oppressive racists. Perceiving the larger society as almost universally racist makes it even more difficult to end the isolation of ghetto dwellers and intensifies feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness that lie at the heart of the inner city malaise. With cynicism and competition for scarce resources prevalent throughout the inner city, ghetto leaders fall to warring among themselves or are coopted into anti-poverty programs that end up accomplishing little or nothing for the average resident.

- single family residences on large lots in or beyond the existing suburbs are built for the few who can afford them. Since this pattern of land use is so

dispersed, streets, highways, sewers, water lines, and other utilities are maximally-expensive, thus further hiking the already prohibitive costs of home ownership and community development outside the central city.[16] To top it off, much of the cost of this suburban development is paid with the federal taxes of central city residents, in effect forcing them to finance the exclusionary zoning policies which are intimately implicated as a cause of the decline of their own neighborhoods.

- residents of middle-class suburbs are able to establish islands of tranquility in the sprawling metropolis, but increasingly the privacy they work so hard to achieve produces alienation among their children, many of whom perceive their suburban enclaves as being "plastic" and "unreal," and is purchased only by maintaining countless small municipalities which have no capacity to deal effectively with pollution, traffic congestion, and other area-wide problems. Sadly, the ultimately ineffectual though perhaps understandable response of many middle-class suburbanites is to withdraw still more completely within the sanctuaries of their homes and immediate neighborhoods in the vain hope that metropolitan problems somehow will solve themselves and wither away.

In short, narrow individualism (the pursuit of short-range private interests in disregard or violation of long-range common interests) and tribalism (the absence of intergroup contacts which might allow for productive cooperation to identify and implement mutually beneficial policies) are rampant in the metropolitan area. Individualism motivates people to produce goods and services and maintain private property. Tribalism is a useful form of social organization for achieving a sense of personal and group identity. But runaway individualism and exclusionary tribalism tend to poison intergroup relationships and exacerbate rather

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[16] New Communities: One Alternative, A Harvard Study of a New City (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard School of Design, June 1968).

than moderate intergroup hostilities and conflicts of interest.[17] The metropolitan area by definition consists of people whose future prosperity and well-being depend on their ability to work together solving problems that transcend neighborhood and community boundaries. It is doubtful whether the metropolitan condition of interdependence can ever be reconciled with individualism and tribalism as they currently are practiced in metropolitan affairs.

Conclusion

The basic argument of this paper has been that segregation and fragmentation in the metropolitan area are creating a spiral of decline which in one way or another adversely affects the lives and futures of all its residents. The manifestations of metropolitan decay are most visible and serious in the inner city poverty areas of its central cities, where 34% of black children under six years of age are in families below the poverty level. In many inner city poverty ghettoes, furthermore, two-thirds to three-quarters of the families are in female-headed households in which mothers generally have a difficult time providing basic physical necessities much less winning the battle to protect their children from the dangers of the streets. Solutions to the problems of inner city education might include socioeconomic and racial desegregation of the metropolitan area as well as radical reform in schools and other community institutions, but such solutions are unlikely to be implemented in the setting of a sprawling metropolis locked into a vicious circle of runaway individualism, self-defeating triablism, and inter-community bitterness and stereotyping. Already we are seeing the formation of what may be the nation's first large underclass in our cities. In this context it is well to ponder the following uncomfortably-familiar passages in which

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[17] "The apoclaypse," in the words of philosopher Michael Novak, "may come, not by fire or flood, but by mass insanity. The civilization in and around New York City surely manifests insanity's advancing stages: everywhere there is hostility, bitterness, resentment - that grinding, bitter resentment of which Nietzsche and Scheler warned." Michael Novak, The Experience of Nothingness (New York: Harper, 1970), p. 8.

historian Elwin H. Powell identifies some of the major developments that marked the decline and fall of another of history's most prestigious and powerful but stratified nations:

> In 55 B.C. 320,000 a third to a half the city's /Rome's/ total population was 'on welfare,' i.e., receiving free wheat from the state, but 'housing' remained in the hands of private enterprise, the free population rented rooms in four story tenements owned by 'slum-lords.' In these 'rabbit warrens' rooms could be used only for eating and sleeping and most of the day and night people 'prowled about, either idling or getting such employment as they could, legitimate or otherwise.' . . . When the Roman could not work as a farmer or warrior he was simply unemployed.
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> The Roman capitalists acquired their fortune by performing services for the state, not through diligent work like the mythical 'protestant-ethic' capitalists of modern society. The Roman capitalist grew fat on government contracts, tax-gathering, and fleecing the poor as money-lenders. A new social structure had come into being with the Punic wars, and 'slowly the old settled ways of full faith and confidence in established custom, in mos majorum, began to break up and dissolve.
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> . . . In 55 B.C. Cicero was already lamenting 'the decline and virtual extinction of our institutions . . . there were no principles by which to steer.' After decades of internal strife between rival factions, armies, urban mobs, armed bands of thugs (private body guards) neither life nor property was secure, and property had always been the more sacred of the two. 'The rule of law had perished long ago,' writes Syme, 'with might substituted for right. Worn and broken by civil war and disorder, the Roman people were ready to surrender the ruinous privilege of freedom and submit to strict government as in the beginning of time. So order came to Rome.'[18]

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[18] Elwin H. Powell, "Anomie and Force: The Case of Rome," Catalyst, Spring 1960. Number 4, 94, 87, 88-89.